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Suicide, Depression, and Youth Drinking

Alcohol used in adolescence is associated with psychological distress and depression.

- Among 12- to 17-year-olds who were current drinkers, 31 percent exhibited extreme levels of psychological distress and 39 percent exhibited serious behavioral problems.¹
- Twelve- to sixteen-year-old girls who were current drinkers were four times more likely than their nondrinking peers to suffer depression.²
- In a recent CSAT study, 48 percent of women in treatment for substance abuse had been sexually abused ³

The severity of behavioral problems in adolescents is significantly associated with increased likelihood of adolescent alcohol use.

- Past-month alcohol use was reported by approximately 14 percent of adolescents with low levels of behavioral problems, by 23 percent of those with intermediate problem scores, and by 38 percent of those with significant behavioral problems.⁴
- Adolescents with serious behavioral problems were nearly three times more likely to use alcohol than those with low levels of behavioral problems.⁵

There is a link between suicide and alcohol use in adolescents.

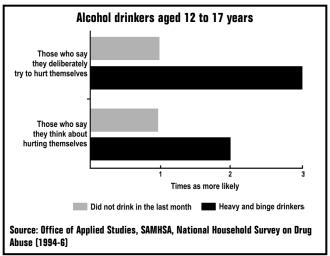
- Twenty-eight percent of suicides by children ages 9 to 15 could be attributed to alcohol.⁶
- Using a national school sample, a study reported that suicide attempts among heavy-drinking adolescents were three to four times greater than among abstainers.

Adolescents struggling with serious emotional disturbances (SED) face even greater challenges when they use alcohol.

- Adolescents with high levels of SED were nearly twice as likely as adolescents with low levels of SED to have used alcohol in the past month.
- Adolescents with high levels of SED were five times as likely as those with low levels of SED to report alcohol dependence.

Co-occurring disorders prompt new federal action.

- Seven to ten million Americans have at least one mental disorder in addition to an alcohol or drug disorder.
- A 5-year blueprint for action to improve recovery chances by increasing quality prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for people with co-occurring disorders was just sent to Congress by Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. ¹⁰



- 1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Office of Applied Studies. The Relationship Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Among Adolescents. (SMA) 99-3286. Rockville, MD: SAMHSA 1999
- 2 Hanna EZ, Hsiao-ye Y, Dufour MC, et al. The relationship of drinking and other substance use alone and in combination to health and behavior problems among youth ages 12-16: Findings from the Third National Health and Nutrition Survey (NHANES III). Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, June 24-29, 2000, Denver, CO.
- 3 Burgdorf K, Chen X, Herrell J. The prevalence and prognostic significance of sexual abuse in substance abuse treatment of women. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), 2001.
- 4 SAMHSA. The Relationship Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Among Adolescents.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Unpublished data extrapolated by National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism from State Trends in Alcohol Mortality, 1979- 1992; US Alcohol Epidemiolgic Data Reference Manual, Volume 5. Rockville, MD: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1996.
- 7 Windle M, Miller-Tutzauer C, Domenico D. Alcohol use, suicidal behavior, and risky activities among adolescents. *J Res Adolesc* 2(4):317-330, 1992.
- 8 SAMHSA. The Relationship Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Among Adolescents.
- 9 Ibio
- 10 Report to Congress on the Prevention and Treatment of Co-Occurring Substance Abuse Disorders and Mental Disorders, SAMHSA, 2002.

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